

GENETICS SOCIETY OF AMERICA  
COMMITTEE ON HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

Committee

George W. Beadle	Curt Stern, Honorary	<u>Office</u>
James F. Crow	H. Bentley Glass, Vice-Chairman	Department of Biology
Donald F. Poulson	Tracy M. Sonneborn, Chairman	Indiana University
Marcus M. Rhoades	Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., <u>ex officio</u>	Bloomington, Indiana 47401
George D. Snell	Frederick B. Churchill, <u>ex officio</u>	812-337-7522

4 January 1978

Dr. Josh Lederberg  
Department of Genetics  
Stanford University School of Medicine  
Stanford, CA 94305

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

A Committee on Historical Documents, recently established by the Genetics Society of America, has selected a list of geneticists whose papers are or will be of historical importance and should be preserved. You are on this list, and I am writing on behalf of the Committee to urge you to take the necessary steps to insure the safety and future availability of your correspondence, notes, and other relevant material.

Dr. Fink, Secretary of the Genetics Society, has prepared a notice to members which describes the sort of material which should be preserved. You probably will be receiving a copy of this directly from Dr. Fink, but for your convenience I enclose a copy herewith.

As to the manner of preservation, this obviously is something you will want to work out for yourself. Dr. Fink has some comments on deposition in his notice to members. I particularly would call attention to Dr. Fink's mention of the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia as a possible depository. The Society for some years has been committed to the preservation of material relevant to the history of biology. Space in the Library of the Society has been set aside for this purpose, and Mr. Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., the Executive Officer, is actively cooperating with the Committee on Historical Documents in the gathering of appropriate material. Dr. Sonneborn or other members of the Committee will gladly assist in putting you in touch with Mr. Bell, should the American Philosophical Society be your choice as a depository.

Perhaps you will not be prepared as yet to reach any conclusion as to the manner of preservation of your papers. In any case, I would be happy to receive and to pass on to the Committee an indication of your willingness to take such steps as may be necessary to insure the preservation of letters and documents that will form an indispensable part of the record of genetic history.

Sincerely yours,

*George D. Snell*

George D. Snell, Ph.D.  
Senior Staff Scientist, Emeritus  
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21 Atlantic Avenue  
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Enc.

## Notice to Members of the Genetics Society of America

All members of the Genetics Society may be affected by an action taken last summer by David Perkins, then President of the Society. He appointed a Committee on Historical Materials in recognition of the importance and desirability of taking steps now to assure that future historians of genetics will have abundant source material to document the fantastic history of twentieth century genetics. Among other things, historians will want to ascertain whether, and if so to what extent, so-called breakthroughs and revolutions depend upon the cumulative day-by-day normal progress of scientific inquiry or upon discontinuous insights or even luck; the extent to which organization and funding aid or impede progress; and perhaps eventually whether there have been in our century important discoveries that are still being largely unappreciated or ignored while awaiting future recognition, confirmation, or rediscovery. To answer such questions and others, historians need not only the documents of outstanding geneticists, but also wide coverage of those of lesser lights.

Both physicists and biochemists have set up organizations to stimulate preservation of historical materials, to locate and inventory those that are deposited, and to make known what materials are available and where. Geneticists are now being called upon to participate in a comparable adventure.

This notice is addressed to all of you to urge you not to let modesty prevent you from cooperating in this task and to suggest what you can do now to take part in it. Older geneticists, already in retirement or approaching it, should first of all select an appropriate depository such as one's own institution or a national archive or library such as that of the American Philosophical Society (which already has a number of such deposits) and then make arrangements for deposition of their materials. Younger geneticists should now form or maintain the habit of holding on to their documents with a view to their eventual deposition.

What sorts of materials should be saved and eventually deposited? As results of consultations with historians of science, archivists and librarians, we suggest the following kinds of items.

1. Letters when they contain more than mere family chit-chat and when not consciously fabricated or altered 'for the record'. Letters from minor figures are held often to be more revealing than guarded letters from major personages. Extended exchanges about scientific matters, institutions, personalities and extra-scientific matters of consequence are also important. Letters and even scribbles of important geneticists may come to be solely in the hands of others on whom their preservation depends. Arrangements can (and perhaps should normally) be made to protect the writer and subjects involved for an extended period. The same safeguards can apply as desired to any of the following.

2. All diaries.

3. Applications for grant support and annual reports of progress.

4. Reports on students, research projects, grant proposals, referee reports, letters of recommendation.

5. Photographs, identified and dated, and other memorabilia.

6. Biographical and autobiographical sketches.

7. Ephemera, crank letters, and unfruitful papers (published or unpublished).

Such items may tell a lot about the cultural setting for scientific research and even dead-end research projects may reveal much about the nature of scientific growth.

8. Documents (letters, minutes, reports) concerning institutions, scientific societies, committees and journals.

9. Complete lists of students, post-docs and assistants, especially from important laboratories, would be enormously useful.

10. Laboratory notebooks. Those of leading geneticists are of course the most important to preserve; it may well not be practicable or even desirable for all geneticists to deposit their lab data and/or notebooks.

Unhappily, the papers of most deceased American geneticists, including some of the greatest, have entirely disappeared or almost so. By cooperating with this committee, you will help minimize such losses in the future. Your committee welcomes opportunities to assist you in any possible way. Through mailings to the membership, and annual reports to the Society, we plan to keep you informed of the work of the committee. Meanwhile we would be grateful to receive your comment and suggestions. And we absolutely need information about arrangements you have made or intend to make concerning the preservation and deposition of your documents and any information you may have about deposition of papers of deceased geneticists, so that we may include all of this in the Survey of Source Materials that we intend to publish eventually.

Committee on Historical Materials

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Send correspondence to:  
Tracy M. Sonneborn  
Department of Biology  
Indiana University  
Bloomington, Indiana 47401

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